

/253 cont./

- 121 We shall indicate here the primitive manifestations of their culture (Persönlichkeitkultur), meaning by this expression what these forest dwellers exhibit from their own culture and not received from the white, and which is easily discovered from living with them.

212 /254/ 1. Writing.

[797] A question that immediately arises is whether these tribes know how to write. One can answer that at present they do not know or use any kind of writing (2).

2. With the exception, naturally, of those who have passed through the Mission schools. One notices this peculiarity: they learn how to write the Portuguese language with some facility, but they write Tukano with difficulty. Actually the letters of the Latin alphabet, which we use and such as we pronounce in Portuguese, do not reproduce all the sounds of the Tukano language.

• 172 It is a question open to discussion as to whether those signs
532 that are found on many stones of the Rio Negro and tributaries, that is, the petroglyphs or itacoatíaras (õxta ohoritirí-pa in Tukano), are a writing of spoken language, or at least ciphered language (of which idiom? of which tribe? in which era?); or are only designs, perhaps stylized (sportive signs /Port. sinais lúdicos/) (3).

3. About the itacoatíaras, their antiquity and their interpretation, cf. the notable work by Bernardo da Silva Ramos, Inscrições e tradições da América pré-histórica /Inscriptions and traditions of Prehistoric America/. Koch Grünberg, going up the river Curicuriari (tributary of the right bank of the Rio Negro), on February 14, 1904, found on a stone designs with the figures

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/footnote 3 cont./ of a man, monkey, and decorative ones, still fresh, perhaps made weeks or days before. He then gives the opinion that an Indian makes the first stroke with some rock. Another, upon going by, makes the line deeper, and so on, until an indelible furrow results (Z. I. 144). The same Koch asked an Indian who served him as guide on the river Cuduiari who might have made the petroglyphs that were seen. And the Indian answered him immediately: -- "The old people did with a rock" (Z. I. 304).

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Would they not, however, have a language for signs or signs corresponding to some ideas? Many travelers who have gone up the Rio Negro were surprised to verify that their coming was already known beforehand, how many made up the retinue, the purpose of the latter, etc. (4).

4. We read, for example, in the "Participação Quinta /Fifth Communication/" (of the "Viagem Filosófica" of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, dated from Barcelos on March 30, 1789, upon his arrival in Ipanuré): -- "I immediately ordered an examination of the five malocas of the savages, located on top of the hill, and for the second time it was confirmed to me that they had already been warned of my ascent; the houses were found deserted, there being left behind all the gear of igaçabas /clay pots/, tipitis, hampers, etc., sufficient tapioca buried in the ground, the pine-apples of the clearing freshly cut, and the Indians of the canoes informed me that they had left two days ago" (o. c.).

S Ni

- 172 It was on the rapids of Kaperwa, while Brian was searching for fossils, that we came across the first rock engravings (see p. 74). These man-like figures, no more than two feet high, extended along the face of an ancient deposit of volcanic ash exposed just above river level. All seemed to be in grotesque dancing postures, their outlined figures carved half an inch into the face of the rock, their webbed hands and feet splayed out and the face portrayed in relief with indentations for the eyes and the mouth. There appeared to have been more which had been almost completely eroded away except for a hand or a foot. We found a similar set of figures extending along the rock on the other side of the channel, equally strange but portraying the same subtle vitality of movement, as if caught in some prehistoric dance.

In all we counted thirty dancers at Kaperwa. How long they had been there was impossible to say. The rock was a hard volcanic tuff. With a high river all the engravings would have been completely submerged. Those on the south bank were sheltered from the sun and mostly covered in moss. There was no pigment or colouring matter and, even had we known the period of time for which they had been submerged, the rate of erosion would have been mere conjecture. Certainly the Indians could explain nothing about them.

Later we came across many such engravings on the Apaporis and the Caquetá. Some on the Apaporis depicted human figures of obscure abstract form with the body shown as a triangle or a square and with foreshortened arms reminiscent of Chibcha art in the Colombian Andes - a civilization contemporary to that of the Incas. Near by on the same rock were two forms representing a crocodile or snake. These were the only animal designs we ever saw. On the Caquetá we found engravings of a more formalized type, seldom depicting human beings but coiled, spiralled and fretted designs; many were very elaborate and covered five or six square feet of the rock face. Some were etched half an inch or more into the hard sandstone, others were mere chipped designs on the surface.

It has been suggested that as these engravings occur mainly at rapids they are more than likely the work of passing canoe men. But it is usually only at these rapids that there are rocks on which these petroglyphs could be drawn. Moreover, many are of such elaborate design that they would take

Ni

weeks to carve into the hard rock. It is possible that some in the past represented boundary marks. The Indians do not appear to recognize territorial areas within the forest, but they may have rights to fish over certain sections of the rivers. 172 •

It is unlikely that the engravings can be ascribed to any one period and there seemed little resemblance to contemporary Indian art. Certainly Tukano design is mostly limited to triangles and crosses, and relies more on colour than form. The most striking example we saw was the *Tatuya maloca* on the Piraparaná, the bark front wall of which was covered with a series of cross, square and triangle designs coloured with brown, yellow and white river clays and a black charcoal compound. But this is by far the most dramatic example of Tukano art, with the possible exception of the elaborate body painting and the magnificent head-dresses used during the festivals. Their pottery, though finely made, bears no design, except for a pot containing the narcotic *yajé*, used only by the elders during certain festivals and curing sessions. This is covered with different coloured clays, charcoal and red *karayuru* dye. Similar triangular coloured designs are also found on the *yarumo* dancing-staves. 531 532

The most common type of engraving is the fretted design on the gourd maracas used during tribal dances. One end of the pebble stave, a lance-like rattle used by the shaman, is also carved with lines and triangles together with a pattern of bird feathers, said to give it greater magical power. This stave and a drinking gourd with an elaborate circular design of triangles, loops and chevrons, we tried to obtain for our collection, but without success. Certain articles were so highly regarded by the Indians that they would not part with them, no matter what they were offered in exchange.

Of all the rock engravings we saw, that of Ni the river god (see drawing on p. 31) was by far the most striking. Travelling on from Kaperwa, we came to an unusually long set of rapids through which we guided the boat with our paddles. We were concentrating so hard on the rapids and the water swirling around the boat, that the unexpected sight of a pyramid of rock jutting massively out of the river in front came as rather a shock. Even more unexpected was the grotesque figure cut deeply into the granite face of the giant boulder. With arms and legs outstretched he seemed to dominate the river, to embrace it with a hypnotic spell. 532 776

Unlike the other carvings we saw, Ni was engraved in granite. The finely-drawn lines, carved half an inch deep, gave symmetry to the life-size figure which must have taken an Indian craftsman months of labour to create. Our own steel knives were easily blunted by the hard crystalline rock.

Ni faced upstream into the setting sun. Behind, on the east slope of the rock, were suns and a quarter-moon. The suns, some with emanating rays, were composed of a series of three or four concentric rings up to two feet in diameter.

Missing Links

said, to travel all the way to the Caquetá without encountering more rapids. 114
We would have to leave our boat behind on the Apaporis, as it would be impossible to take it across without the assistance of many Indians. We would have to get help from the Miritiparaná, and a boat, in order to continue our journey to the Caquetá. This was the first time that we knew exactly what lay ahead of us; from then on we would follow Alirio's instructions. He kindly sent his son and one of his workmen to help us over the rapids which we had to pass before the portage. That night we came to Lugo's house where we had a less friendly welcome. Heavy-set, urbane and gold-toothed, Lugo offered us little. We asked if we could sling our hammocks in the house and he grudgingly consented; so Brian asked him to join us in a meal. Horacio was furious. 'Why?' he said. 'Why should we offer him our hospitality? ... It is for him to invite us.'

The following day, as we continued down the river, we wondered why Lugo should have been forced to live out his life in the forests of the Amazon. Surely it could not have been his wish; and what did he fear in strangers? Perhaps it was better than a lifetime in gaol. Later, while we were collecting rock samples, we came across the rock carvings called Boheniambo. Scattered over the flat sandstone island in the centre of the river, these formalized carvings, none of them more than two feet long, seemed to be imitations of Chibcha art from the Andean highlands. The figures, with stylized triangular head, square body and foreshortened arms crossed in front of the chest, were a contrast to the more natural art of the Piraparaná. 172

There was no moon that night and the rain clouds were heavy, as we tried to find the small hut which would show where the portage lay. Flashing our torch along the bank we became anxious. Somewhere below us lay more rapids and we were afraid of being swept away into them. Suddenly the beam of the torch showed up a small grass-roofed shelter - it was the portage. 114
We knew the worst of our journey was over. The same night Horacio went ahead with José to see if he could make contact with a *cauchero*, Don Carlos, whom Alirio had spoken of. We unloaded *El Diablo* for the last time, for here she had to be abandoned.

Don Carlos greeted us as if passing travellers were an everyday occurrence. Tall, slim and proud, like a Bogotáno, he was the last person we would have expected to find here. Though he wore a pyjama top and had a towel round his neck to flick flies and wipe the sweat from his forehead, he looked as if he might be equally at home in a dark suit, with white collar and furled umbrella.

In no time our great heap of equipment was whisked away by Indian helpers across the portage. The difficulties we had foreseen seemed to vanish. Five hours later we were sitting down to a magnificent meal of chicken and rice in Don Carlos's wooden-frame house, surrounded by green banana palms and manioc plantations overlooking the muddy Miritiparaná.

Epilogue

172 Then there were the rock carvings in the Amazon, archaic yet extraordinarily alive. If art is an expression of a culture, these drawings could not have been the work of tropical foresters like the Tukano. From a hunting-fishing people you might expect to see fish or animals drawn naturalistically or in the abstract; yet we only once found this side of their existence expressed, and that was not in the Piraparaná. Many of the figures portrayed suns and moons, yet as far as we were aware neither had special significance in Tukano life. Moreover, Ni, standing as he did, isolated on a pinnacle of rock high above the river, made an almost emotional impact, as if the artist had wished to identify himself with the figure. It was drawn with an intensity of feeling completely foreign to the personality of the Amazonian. Yet José was able to tell us of a legend about it and the Indians had identified their own mystical spirit or water god with it.

Most of the figures were cut in sandstone and might have been sculptured by chipping with a harder rock, perhaps flint. But a fair number, including Ni, were cut as much as half an inch deep into granite rock which blunted our own knives. It is puzzling to know what implement could have been used, and staggering to consider the work involved.

Then there were the strange squared figures on the Apaporis, like the cardmen in Alice. We had noticed half-moon shapes like necklaces with pendants. These, like the squares, reminded us of Inca and Chibcha ornaments and loom-worked cotton cloaks, unshaped by the hand of a tailor.

In the Caquetá there seemed to be a third style of art, abstract, rather intellectual. Here the human form mattered little. Heads were squared, bodies were contorted into extraordinary shapes. There were large carvings covering ten square feet; a mass of intricate squares, frets, coils and spirals. It was as if the rocks had for ages been used as a vast sketchbook on which passing travellers had engraved their own conception of artistic design.

000 An Indian came to us during those endless days of waiting at the frontier post and told us of a cliff-face which was covered in drawings, many of them coloured. He offered to take us there if we wished. But it was several days' journey through the forest and we dared not go, for while we were away the gunboat might have come and gone, and that would have meant waiting for months.

What is the significance of all these drawings? One immediately begins to think of past civilizations in the forest. They may be some form of writing or communication. Perhaps they are the work of migratory peoples, moving north-south or east-west, from Panama to the Pampas, from the Andes to the mouth of the Amazon. In time it may be possible to make a compre-

000 ABOVE: Maraca woman playing a musical bow. BELOW LEFT: A boy with bird arrows and a pet toucan. BELOW RIGHT: The Motilon discover the wheel.

[see p. 182-A]